

Cathedral of St Michael and St George, Grahamstown, South Africa

Date: 19 April 2019 (Good Friday)

Text: Matthew 26:69-75

Theme: Peter's Testimony: The disciple who denied knowing Jesus

My name is Peter. I am the disciple who denied knowing Christ when he was arrested and prosecuted at the palace of the high priest. The name given to me by my parents was Simon. Jesus changed my name to Peter, meaning "the Rock". I am a Jew and my brother's name is Andrew. I was a fisherman. Fishing is our family profession. I was one of the 12 disciples of Jesus Christ. After I became Jesus's disciple, my status changed for the better. I was elevated from a fisherman to a fisher-of-men. I rose to fame and became a public figure because whenever Jesus sent us out to preach, I performed miracles and cast out demons using the name of Christ. Of the 12 twelve disciples of Jesus, I was one of the closest to Jesus. For instance, I was one of the three who went with Jesus to the mountain where he was transfigured. I was one of the three that were with him in the Garden of Gethsemane when he went to pray. I was also the disciple that Jesus sent to go to the river to take money from the mouth of the fish to pay taxes.

I am very outspoken, confident and bold and has deep spiritual knowledge about the person and mission of Jesus Christ. I was the only disciple that walked on water at Christ's bidding. When Jesus asked about our perception of Him, I was the one that spoke on behalf of other disciples— "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." Jesus was impressed at my response and confirmed that it was the spirit of God that revealed the answer that I gave. Let me mention that I am very loyal and committed to Jesus. I remember the moment when the followers of Jesus left Him and Jesus asked the 12 of us if we were deserting too. I was the one who rose to the occasion and spoke for rest 11 that "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life, and we have come to believe and to know that you are the Christ." Brothers and Sisters, the summary is that I love Jesus, and I can do anything for him. I can even kill for the sake of Christ. If you doubt me, ask the servant of the high priest that I cut off his ear when they came to arrest Jesus.

However, despite my love and passion for Christ, I fell. I disowned my Master. Towards the last days of Jesus Christ and before His crucifixion, Jesus called me aside and told me that Satan asked to sift me like wheat, but He had prayed for me so that my faith would not fail. I heard what Jesus said, but I did not take it to heart. About the same time, Jesus was with the 12 of us, He told us that we would all fail and disown Him, but being confident of my passion and love for Him, I responded that "Even if all fall away, I never will never." Jesus looked at me and said before the rooster crows that night, I would disown Him three times. I replied to Him, "Even if I have to die with Him, I will never disown Him." But friends, as Christ predicted, I denied Him. I failed. My confidence and boldness failed me when my faith was tested. What actually happened was that a large army and servants of the high priest came to arrest Jesus. I reacted by striking-off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest who came to arrest Jesus with my sword. To my surprise, Jesus put back the man's ear and the man was healed immediately. I was astonished that Jesus quietly followed these people that came to arrest him like a criminal. Upon Jesus arrest, most of his followers fled, but I followed Him to the high priest's palace where He was to be tried, although at a distance.

I watched Jesus being beaten and humiliated by my fellow Jews. I was shocked that Jesus did not resist them. It was already dark and the weather that evening was very cold, so the crowd that came to watch the trial of Jesus gathered around the fire in the palace to keep warm. I also joined the crowd at the firelight. At the firelight, a servant girl who was also seated looked at me very closely and said: "This man was with Jesus." But I denied it, I said, "Woman, I don't know Him." This was my first denial. I moved away from where I was seated to another side to avoid people's attention. But another

servant girl saw me and said to those standing around, “This fellow is one of them.” Again, I denied it—my second denial. Then, I became uneasy and extremely afraid because I didn’t know what would happen to me; perhaps, I would be arrested and tortured like Christ. After a while, those standing there came up to me and said, “Surely you are one of them, for your accent is that of a Galilean. Then, I began to call down curses on myself and swore, “I don’t know the man. I don’t know what you’re talking about—my third denial. Immediately, the rooster crowed. Jesus, standing at the accused dock, looked at me in the crowd and our eyes met. Then, I remembered His prediction that before the rooster crows, I would disown Him three times. I then realised the full malice of what I have done and was overwhelmed with shame and sorrow. I could no longer trust myself to remain “to see the end” what would happen to Jesus. So, I went out of the place and wept bitterly.

I went home and began to think and reflect on what made me betray my Master and Lord that I have known and believed over three years. Upon my reflection, I identified two weaknesses of mine. The first was **self**. I trusted in self and my own powers. I felt no need for help. I taught since I am a bold and outspoken person that has deep spiritual knowledge, I could withstand any test of faith that may come my way without the help of God. Instead of me to trust in the Lord, I leaned on self, and my strength and confidence failed me to the extent that I went down to defeat before the verbal onslaught of servant girls. I forgot that scripture that says the arm of flesh will fail us. Instead of me to heed the word and warning of Christ, I did not, and I failed.

My second weakness was **Fear**. Fear gripped me. I was afraid. There was nothing I felt I could do to help my Master. I was afraid because I saw Jesus who had performed miracles, raised the dead, fed thousands of people miraculously and performed many other miracles apparently became helpless. I was afraid to the extent that I lacked the courage to stand up to the maidservants and declare openly that I was a disciple of Jesus. I was also afraid Jesus would die, and fear for my own life as well. I quickly found I was not as courageous as I had thought and proclaimed, and in fear, I denied my Master and Lord.

Friends, I regretted my actions. I felt guilty; I felt like committing suicide. I became remorseful and I repented. I asked for God’s mercy. And I did not waste time in doing this. I remembered what Jesus told me that the enemy came to ask him to sift me like wheat, but that He has prayed for me. This understanding immediately changed my attitude. I began to focus on Christ, who had known beforehand, my weaknesses and the tests that I would face, and had prayed for me. I realised that when Jesus looked at me after I disowned Him the third time, it was a look of mercy and compassion, not of condemnation. From then on, I saw Christ’s love for me from another perspective. I remembered that, after all, it was for my sake and others that He died. Even though I failed my test by denying Jesus, God in His mercy forgave me and resurrected my faith. Friends, I came to my senses. I got refreshed and restored. Today, I am able to preach the same gospel of Jesus crucified. Friends, I ensured I fulfilled Jesus’ request that when I have repented, I should strengthen my brothers and sisters. I did strengthen them. In fact, I was the one who entered the empty tomb where Jesus was laid. I was also the person God used to preach to the crowd on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit visited us.

Brothers and sisters, I want you to learn from my story and testimony. Trust in the Lord and lean not on your own understanding. The scripture says anyone who thinks he or she is standing should watch, lest he or she falls. I thought I was standing and I did not watch, then, I fell. Each of us would probably have responded to Jesus’ warning the same way I did. But, do not be like me. Always take heed to the warning of the Lord. It pays and saves. Friends, I found that many in their Christian journey deny Christ again and again. For anytime you fail to stand or speak for Christ, you are denying Him. When you know the right thing as a child of God and you fail to do it, you are denying Christ. When you fail to show love to the next person to you, you are denying Christ. All of us at one time or the other

have denied Christ. A passage in our *Book of Common Prayer* says, we have named the name of Christ, but we have not departed from iniquity. Friends, although you might have denied Christ in word and indeed, you can rise again. That you denied Christ yesterday does not mean you cannot preach Christ tomorrow. Remember that Paul, my brother and close friend from Tarsus persecuted Christ, but he later preached Christ. When you fall, repent, and do it quickly, and God will restore you. Amen.

Revd Idowu A Akinloye.